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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: OMAN MEDIA REACTION: Trafficking in Persons Report

¶1. SUMMARY: While the number of Omani papers responding to date to the release of the 2008 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report is to date limited (to wire service material in on English private daily and more targeted coverage in a pair of Arabic and English sister papers), one paper has made the issue the subject of two, by local standards, fiery editorials, and online reaction has been swift and predictably negative. Meanwhile, editorials continue to express discontent with the situation in Iraq. END SUMMARY.

TIP: "RANDOM ACCUSATIONS FOR DIRTY PURPOSES"

¶2. On June 5, private Arabic daily "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) lashed out in response to the just-released TIP report, claiming blackmail as the new policy motivating Oman's tier 3 rating and asking, "Why this Blackmail?":

"The Sultanate has taken great steps towards protecting human rights and has worked to create an atmosphere in which every individual can exercise his or her rights and practice their religious beliefs freely. Oman made a lot of progress on combating human trafficking and on ending any practice that prejudices the lives, rights, and freedoms of others. The government of Oman participated in the UN conference of the Global Initiative to Combat Human Trafficking. Omani officials understand the need for justice for all people, regardless of color, race, social status, and position. Unfortunately, America, which has declared itself the defender of human rights, insists on releasing reports that undo the tireless efforts of Oman. What makes it worse is that these accusations come from a country that is characterized as an ally and friend, which has deep ties based on mutual interests and economic cooperation, security and mutual respect. However, it seems that there a shift in the U.S. policy with its allies in the region. This shift is towards the practice of blackmail, which Washington resorts to when there is a conflict, or when it is in its interest to achieve political gains at the expense of the region and its stability, prosperity and security. The United States should have looked at itself and evaluated itself before evaluating others, because corruption emerges in every detail of their lives. In addition, America should distance itself from pursuing such empty and mindless policies and from making random accusations for dirty purposes. At least it would not lose what was left of the respect between her and the people of this region and the world."

¶3. A June 9 commentary, also in "Al-Watan", "The Sultanate and the U.S. Tip Report", said:

"Despite serious and sincere efforts, the U.S. insists on listing the Sultanate as Tier 3 in the TIP Report. Why did the U.S. sign an FTA agreement if Oman is a country that traffics in persons? The U.S. report turns a blind eye to the violations of human rights in the U.S. itself, in Israel and Iraq."

ONLINE: PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF

¶4. Oman's most active online discussion site, Al Sabla (www.omania2.net), posted strong reaction to the publishing of the TIP report. One discussion thread, titled "U.S. Insists on Placing Oman on the List of Human Trafficking Countries" received 32 comments and 1,235 views, one of the most active threads in the forum. Among the strongest quotes:

"Who appointed America to make such a report?"
"Ignore them and their reports because it is only lies."
"Why they don't look to what is happening inside their country and the corruption that is taking place?"
"Our government deserves it because they are submissive to the infidel country like America sacrificing the teaching of our religion."

IRAQ: "CONVENTION ON SUBMISSION TO THE OCCUPATION"

¶5. "Al-Watan", also on June 8, criticized a proposed military agreement between the U.S. and Iraq, simultaneously accusing Western media of propagandizing and a cover-up. According to "Now that the dimensions of the plot is Unfolded":

"It is doubtful that those who supported America and Britain in invading Iraq expected that the end would be an agreement prolonging the invasion and robbing Iraqis of their independence and dignity. The terms of the agreement, described by Western media propaganda as

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the 'Convention on Understanding and Cooperation', is instead a 'Convention on Submission to the Occupation'. Western media have painted this invasion as a humanitarian effort aimed at freeing Iraqis from tyranny to establish freedom. None of those promises were achieved. They avoid revealing that America is withholding \$50 billion from Iraq that will be released only when the Iraqi government signs this suspicious agreement. The U.S. administration is urging the signing of this agreement to provide the next administration with evidence that the invasion of Iraq benefited America, and was not just a historic catastrophe as American and other observers think."

GRAPPO